NATIONAL SECURITY TELECOMMUNICATIONS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

April 12, 2006

The Honorable George W. Bush
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

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Dear Mr. President:

The unprecedented communications challenges posed by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita highlighted that some existing communications systems still lack sufficient levels of operability and interoperability among the multiple response and recovery entities including the Departments of Homeland Security and Defense, the National Guard, State and Local Governments, critical infrastructure sectors, and other non-Governmental organizations. Your February 2006 report, *The Federal Response to Hurricane Katrina: Lessons Learned,* recommends development of a National Emergency Communications Strategy that supports communications operability and interoperability, and advises that the strategy consider the direction of the telecommunications industry and supporting recommendations of your National Security Telecommunications Advisory Committee (NSTAC). The NSTAC Principals fully endorse the creation of an overarching National Emergency Communications Strategy and offer our strong commitment to assist in its development.

The NSTAC has identified immediate actions that will significantly improve the Nation's emergency communications capabilities prior to the upcoming 2006 hurricane season while recognizing that some elements may already have begun. Without prompt action, effective coordination and response to National incidents will remain severely hampered this summer and beyond. The NSTAC recommends that you direct the Department of Homeland Security and other appropriate agencies to accelerate their efforts and adequately resource actions to assure completion, prior to the summer of 2006, of the recommended initiatives listed below:

1. Establish a uniform protocol working with Federal, State, and Local Government organizations that can dynamically identify their emergency management coordinators' contact information, especially during times when regular contact information is changed due to event situations, and have a capability to share that information with DHS (e.g., via websites). This capability should be administered by the National Communications System (NCS) in concert with the National Coordinating Center (NCC) to assist in its execution of Emergency Support Function #2 for communications. The capability will enable rapid contact and coordination with response entities pursuant to Recommendation #35 of the *Lessons Learned Report.*

2. Create a deployable communications capability for the Gulf Coast region in accordance with Recommendation #37 of the *Lessons Learned Report.* This capability must focus on rapidly deployable, interoperable mobile communications solutions that will provide reliable communications to emergency responders at all levels of Government in a disaster-affected region. We anticipate that this capability will be a prototype that can be quickly established throughout the Nation for use as a gap-filler when communications infrastructure has been damaged by natural or man-made disasters. NSTAC companies are prepared to actively provide expertise and support for this capability.

3. Formally integrate the NCS national security and emergency preparedness priority programs (e.g., Telecommunications Service Priority, Government Emergency Telecommunications Service, and Wireless Priority Service) into the National Emergency Communications Strategy pursuant to Recommendation #34 of the *Lessons Learned Report*. These priority programs have demonstrably enhanced communications operability and interoperability and could further complement State and Local first responder communications in support of public health, safety and law enforcement requirements.

4. Additionally, the NSTAC recommends that you direct the National Telecommunications and Information Administration to work in conjunction with the Federal Communications Commission to streamline the authorization process for use of Federal incident response (IR) frequencies by the larger non-Federal Government emergency response community. Removing barriers to responsively authorize use of Federal IR frequencies will facilitate interoperability between Federal and non-Federal emergency responders.

In addition to these immediately applicable recommendations, your NSTAC has recently provided other recommendations addressing specific critical communications concerns as a result of its ongoing review of the Hurricane Katrina response. Our previous correspondence has addressed a broad range of issues such as ensuring access and suitable credentialing for telecommunications infrastructure provider response personnel, formally designating such personnel as "Emergency Responders" to enable provision of non-monetary Federal assistance under the *Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (Stafford Act)*, and improving industry-Government incident response coordination via the NCC. These recommendations also deserve consideration for incorporation into the overall National Emergency Communications Strategy.

Thank you for this opportunity to make these recommendations to further strengthen our Nation's emergency responder communications. Adoption of these critical recommendations will help ensure that short-term interoperability solutions are implemented prior to the upcoming hurricane season. On behalf of the NSTAC Principals, I thank you for your support and we look forward to continuing our work with you and your staff.

Sincerely,

F. Duane Ackerman
NSTAC Chair

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